

Hi Peer & Jason,

I wasn't involved in video art back then, but my understanding of the Warhol piece in 1965 that involved video was that it in fact was not a video piece, and the Norelco machine used was not a portable unit.

The piece was in fact a 16mm film that included a video tape playing in the background behind the woman being filmed (Edie Sedgewick). So, he used a video camera and recorder in the production of the film, but he created and showed a film, not video.

The Norelco in question was apparently a motorized camera head with a long cable that went to a desktop recorder. I came across a photo of them (Warhol and Sedgewick) with the camera in it. Assuming the caption of the photo is accurate, it's obviously not a portable camera.

A quote from Warhol from "POPism: The Warhol Sixties" says:

"We had a videotape machine around the Factory for a few months that summer and fall. It was the first home recording equipment I'd ever seen - and I definitely haven't seen anything like it since either. It wasn't portable, it just sort of sat there. It was on a long stalk and it had a head like a bug and you sat at a control panel and the camera re-jointed itself like a snake and sort of angled around like a light for a drawing board. It was great-looking."

I have attached to this email a copy of that photo which was captioned "Edie, Andy, and the Norelco" and found at:  
<http://www.warholstars.org/warholfilm/andywarhol7.html>

(I blew the image up a bit to get a better look at the camera)

I think a lot of people documenting early video use the term "portable" loosely. The desktop (non-porta-pak) recorders had a handle and could be lifted by one person, as opposed to the larger machines that lived in TV studios. This made them "portable" in a sense, even when they weren't the battery powered porta-pak type. Over time a lot of references to "portable" seem to have been (inaccurately) changed to "porta-pak".

...Dave

Tom Sherman also commented on his wall post.

Tom wrote:

"Jason, the Norelco units were around before Sony's Portapak and some authors have claimed that Warhol was working with a Norelco recorder. Paik's claim was that he used the newly released Sony Portapak in 1965. I investigated the idea that Sony had prereleased prototypes of the Portapak in Japan prior to the North American release in 1967. Shula Abe, Paik's engineer/collaborator flatly states that there were no prototypes in Japan or the US before 1967. Your speculation that Paik was not in a cab but shooting from a building is proposed quite clearly in my text. Without the tape and an analysis of camera angles/perspective it can only be speculation that a AC-powered studio deck was used to shoot a tape shown at the Cafe a Go-Go.

My interest in researching and writing my text was to point out a basic inconsistency in video art history. Paik claimed to do something that was impossible (there was no Sony Portapak in 1965). The 1965 myth has been substantiated by endless recounts of this highly unlikely event in 40-odd years of contemporary art history. If Mark Grimm is implying that it is more likely that a number of people began using the Sony Portapak to make art as soon as portable video was available, I think that is a more likely scenario. This is no knock on Paik, but points out that the substantial history of video art in America (and any European will tell you that the German artist Wolf Vostell was a step ahead of Paik) is built on rather shaky ground. Perhaps it is time for this history to be reformed into a more inclusive, pluralist picture of the way many artists responded to access to the tools for producing electronic art.  
a few seconds ago · Like"

Very interesting insights, I love the flyer. I also have been curious as to the fast and loose academic writings on the subject of video and other varieties of media art, i'd love to meet sometime and pick your brain. Thanks for your contribution!

-Jason

On Fri, Oct 8, 2010 at 6:18 PM, Jeremy N Culler <[jculler1@binghamton.edu](mailto:jculler1@binghamton.edu)> wrote:

Thanks Sherry for copying me to this discussion. As you are aware, I have spent a considerable amount of time with both primary and secondary sources concerning this matter and others that do not check out. The real problem in the

literature is that people have propagated and/or perpetuated some of these myths (inadvertently sometimes) by citing previously published texts and/or first hand accounts as definitive examples or absolute facts without back checking their sources (a case in point is Michael Rush's *Video Art* that launches off the 1965 date as marking the emergence of "video art," which I take issue with). And if one does not know much about the subject, for example the history of Sony's marketing of its first consumer video cameras and tape recorders, then it is easy to incorporate problematic material such "Paik 'begat' video art with his Portapak\*"--or the famous example that Paik bought a "Portapak" at the Liberty Music Shop in 1965 and subsequently got into a cab to tape (in real-time and *en plein air*) the Pope's visit. I came across a flier a long time ago for an infamous Cafe au Go Go screening in Judson Rosenbush, editor, *Videa 'n' Videology: Nam June Paik, 1959-1973* (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1974). Thought you might be interested in it--though, you might have already seen it. This text is indicative of many of Paik's writings during this period, which seem to promote a particular type of excitement and future vision, which scholars latched onto as they were writing their "historical perspectives." And at the time, they were probably excited to have discovered what they saw was an important "flash point" in the history of video as an artistic medium. It as we are finding out is no doubt significant, but also problematic on so many levels.

This discussion and our previous discussions on this matter have proved invaluable.

\*note: even the term "Portapak" is used loosely in the literature--i.e., "Paik bought his first Portapak in 1965," which I see a lot.

Well off to more writing. Enjoy your weekend. The weather is suppose to be wonderful.

Best,  
Jeremy

On Fri, Oct 8, 2010 at 4:04 PM, Jason Bernagozzi

<[jason.bernagozzi@gmail.com](mailto:jason.bernagozzi@gmail.com)> wrote:

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> Sherry,

> How perfect! I am interesting to read some of Jeremy's work.

>

> Apart from Zeilinski, I have heard this assertion come from other european video and film artists such as Andrea Flamini. When it is discussed in depth, their arguments are based around the commercial distribution of the CV-2400

portapak, ignoring that other artists were making video pieces from portable video recorders at the same time and/or the possibility of a half truth: Paik plugged in his machine outside of a cab ride, but taped and screened the footage for friends. Nonetheless, I found it curious that definitive assumptions were made on tidbits of techno-trivia, especially from well known scholars.

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> -Jason

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> On Fri, Oct 8, 2010 at 3:44 PM, sherry hocking

<[etc@experimentaltvcenter.org](mailto:etc@experimentaltvcenter.org)> wrote:

>>

>> Thanks Peer for sharing with us Jason's communicate about Paik's Portapak

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>> I am also copying Jeremy Culler, who is a PhD candidate in art history at Binghamton doing a thesis on video. There are some of the citations for Tom's paper on the ETC site

[http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/pdf/ShermanThePrematureBirthofVideoArt\\_2561.pdf](http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/history/pdf/ShermanThePrematureBirthofVideoArt_2561.pdf)

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>> As you know, the CV 2000 is a studio deck; you could buy a camera as an input. It ran off 110AC however, and was in no sense portable... Others were using this kind of studio set-up to record video and screen it at the same time Paik "begat" video art with his portapak...

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>> It's an interesting story, and it would be neat if we could find some other factual information concerning the "myth".

>>

>> Thanks - S

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Jeremy Culler

PhD Candidate

History and Theory of Art and Architecture

State University of New York, Binghamton

P.O. Box 6000

Binghamton, NY 13902-6000

[jculler1@binghamton.edu](mailto:jculler1@binghamton.edu)

Date: Fri, 8 Oct 2010 13:43:50 -0400

Subject: Re: interesting things

From: [jason.bernagozzi@gmail.com](mailto:jason.bernagozzi@gmail.com)

To: [peerbode@hotmail.com](mailto:peerbode@hotmail.com)

Peer,

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The distinction in this Paik debate is that the popularized commercial portapak model Sony CV-2400 did not come out until 1967. However, other artists such as Fred Forest and Andy Warhol also got their hands on portapak prototypes, and in Warhol's case (a camera he got from Norelco) he showed underground video work a couple of weeks before Paik's Cafe A Go Go screening.

But that still does not clear Paik, since the story supposedly goes that Paik was in a cab after buying a camera from the store and happened to tape the pope's visit. What Paik most likely bought was not the popular 1967 Sony CV-2400, but a precursor camera that was less portable, the Sony CV-2000 which launched in the summer of 1965. Now the thing people said was that the CV-2000 was only a tape recorder, no camera, but Sony did sell another kit as a supplement to this recorder, VCK-2000 which included a microphone, tripod and camera.

Other possibilities include that Paik had access to an earlier version of the Sony Portapak (the CV-2400), sent to him from Japan. Shigeko Kubota, told Skip Blumberg she thinks that Nam June's older brother sent him a CV-2400 from Japan in 1965.

Paik probably did not shoot the footage from a cab due to the power requirements and weight of the device \*although it is possible\*, but he was capable of shooting the footage and replaying it that evening.

So in this sense Zeilinski isn't completely wrong, but a lot of assumptions were made because there wasn't enough documentation of the specifics of the event. However, the screening definitely happened at Cafe A Go Go, and it coincides with the pope's visit.

As for sources, there is Douglas Davis' book "Nam June Paik", some mentions of this controversy are found in Chris Meigh Andrews' book "A History of Video Art".

Tom Sherman (btw, met and talked with him for a while, interesting guy) wrote his research into this matter in this blog entry. I contacted him to get his sources and will forward those to you:

<http://marotzki.blogspot.com/2007/01/video-art-ber-nam-june-paik.html>

other web references:

[http://www.smecc.org/sony\\_cv\\_series\\_video.htm](http://www.smecc.org/sony_cv_series_video.htm)

<http://www.warholstars.org/chron/1965.html>

<http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/20075>

Enjoy!  
-Jason